CREATOR

VOLUME 31 NUMBER 1

Symphony in Sea Major

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."
Revelation 4:11

If you were asked to describe a great piece of music to someone born deaf, how would you do it? Would you use sign language? Paper and ink? Paints and canvas? Or would you engage a computer design application to portray the musical masterpiece?

In ways far superior to our own, Jesus has already accomplished this! He does not use brushstrokes of oil or acrylic but underwater animals. And the "symphony" Christ paints is performed by "musicians" He uniquely placed into a beautiful living orchestra, the *coral reef*.

What does the music of coral look like? Many reefs reveal a riot of contrasting colors that might be considered "gaudy" outside their special home. Yet, the infinite wisdom of Christ's divine mind (Psalm 104:24) mysteriously blends them into perfect harmony. The "notes" of a coral reef symphony include thousands of creatures, moving swiftly, effortlessly back and forth. Fish, weaving themselves in and out of schools, skillfully sound forth Christ's glory on a coral stage backlit by a kaleidoscope of color.

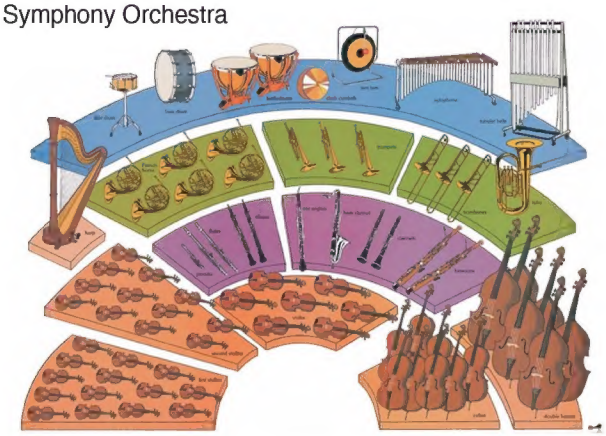
Every good and perfect gift is from above. Jesus is the great "Composer of the composers." No virtuoso can compete with Him, for His skill is infinitely greater. Among His finest compositions is life itself. Instead of simple notes, He uses minute and impossibly complex cells to fashion the intricate concertos of all living things. In this last of a three-part series on the ocean, we examine two brilliant works of our Creator that sing forth His greatness: the incomparable *coral reef* and the improbable world of *hydrothermal vents*. One of these ecosystems is dependent upon the Sun, the other, Earth's heat.

Coral radiates the beauty of the Lord.

SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS

A symphony orchestra is composed of musicians under the skillful guidance of an orchestra director. A typical orchestra features around 100 people.

Symphony Orchestra



ECOSYSTEMS

All ecosystems showcase living creatures under the skillful direction of our great Lord Jesus Christ. A typical coral reef possesses well over one million animals.

It is often helpful to compare an extremely complex thing with something far simpler to better understand both. Such is the case with the mind-bogglingly complex and stunningly beautiful coral reef.

The faithful Puritan pastor, William Bates (1625–1699), compared the individual parts of Creation to musical instruments. But he also cautioned against observing something in nature (like a coral reef) and failing to notice the nature of its Creator, by whom all things have their being: "It is not the viewing [of] a musical instrument . . . and the strings . . . that produce delight, but hearing the harmonious and pleasant diversity of their sounds."[1]

We could say that it's not merely the sight of a healthy coral reef—as beautiful as they are—that pleases our hearts, but savoring the character of Him who made it. Pastor Bates emphasizes that it is a sincere appreciation of the "music that springs from the . . . laws of nature," being "perfectly tuned . . . that ravishes the soul with true pleasure."

In other words, a failure to relish the "symphony" of God's attributes "sung out" by a coral reef will lead us to quickly forget the beauty of the reef by drawing our attention to other things. Sadly, Bates observed that few in his day relished the Lord's character seen so clearly throughout His Creation due to ignorance or lack of interest.

An ignorant person is insensitive to Christ's creative skills because they are as "a stone carved into the shape of a man," a heartless statue. More tragic is the person who knows that they have been blessed by God with five senses yet chooses not to use them to magnify the "great Creator . . . for all His works." Pastor Bates rightly admonishes us that our Lord's glory should be enjoyed even in the tiniest things,[2] but most of us don't take the time to study them.

1 William Bates, *The Whole Works of Rev. W. Bates, D.D. Vol. I* (Harrisonburg VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1990), p. 45

2 Pastor Bates saw insects, spiders, and mites as among "the greatest works in nature."

First Movement

THE CORAL REEF

A coral reef is an intense gathering of marine creatures (Psalm 104:25). Our Lord Jesus Christ *unites* the numerous individual parts of a reef while maintaining amazing *diversity*. Twenty-five percent of all sea creatures call reefs their home. But how can so many organisms possibly live in one place? This remains a mystery to most scientists. It is estimated that some coral reefs feature up to a million animals, each tenderly cared for by our Creator.

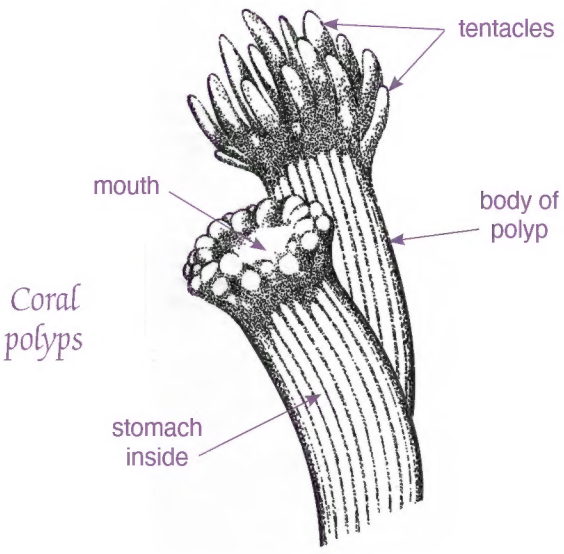
One particular creature used by the King of Glory to build the foundation of a reef is a tiny, soft-bodied *polyp*. Working together, countless tiny polyps can sink ships,[3] illustrating what God said to the Apostle Paul, "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Coral Polyps

Shaped like upside-down jellyfish, coral polyps are quite small, about the size of a pencil eraser. God's design of them is both simple and eloquent: fluid-filled sacs with tentacles that reach upward. Over 6,000 different species of coral polyps have been identified thus far. Some marine biologists believe that there are three times this many yet to be discovered!

With the consistency of jelly, a polyp uses its tentacles like an octopus to bring food into its central mouth, which leads to its stomach. Unlike the octopus, which can move freely about, coral polyps perform their concert seated in one spot for life.

Coral polyps are meat-eaters (as with all Cnidaria[4]—jellyfish, anemones, corals, and *Hydra*[5]). Yet, they have no teeth with which to chew, nor eyes with which to see. At night,



when zooplankton are plentiful, they blindly wave their tentacles through the surrounding water in an attempt to catch food. During the day, coral polyps withdraw their tentacles into the safety of their stony chairs.

Their small size and lack of mobility may be why our loving Creator—who protects and nourishes His Creation—gave them a secret weapon. Christ arms the tentacles of Cnidaria with multiple, poisonous, coiled harpoons. When a small creature ventures too close to the tentacles, stinging cells shoot out, injecting toxin into it, which stuns the prey and allows the flimsy arms of the polyp to grab hold of it as a meal.

Locations

Corals thrive best in intense sunlight. Creator Jesus fills the cells of each polyp with thousands of microscopic plants, called *zooxanthellae* (pronounced zoh - oh - zan - THEL - lee). He essentially merges a plant with an animal—an example of *symbiosis* (sim - bye - OH - sis). Most corals do not grow well in the ocean below 165 feet (50 meters). Clean, clear, warm water and plenty of sunshine are needed for food to be produced via photosynthesis. Ninety percent of a coral's food energy, in fact, comes from these internalized plants.

3 See the section titled "Skeleton" starting on page 4.
4 Cnidaria is pronounced nye - DAR - ee - uh.
5 Read about *Hydra* in ***CREATOR*** Volume 22 Number 1.

Zooxanthellae

Zooxanthellae, which are actually a type of *algae*, dye many corals a green hue. These tiny plants and the coral polyps they inhabit benefit each other. Coral produces carbon dioxide, which is used by the zooxanthellae during photosynthesis to make food and oxygen. Polyps receive up to 90% of their energy needs from zooxanthellae. Corals feed at night using their tentacles and photosynthesize during the day. Imagine if God filled our skin with algae; we might eat fewer and smaller meals . . . but would have the appearance of a cucumber!

Coral filled with zooxanthellae

Zooxanthellae can also be found in many types of soft corals, sponges, anemones, and clams. The largest of these emerald-colored animals happens to be the biggest clam in the ocean. The giant coral clam weighs up to 550 lbs (250 kg), and reaches four-and-one-half feet (1.37 m) in length!

Amazing Colors

Polyps manufacture pigments of their own that greatly add to a coral's stunning display. Under the supreme direction of Christ Jesus, individual polyps work steadily to compose a medley of beautiful hues. Within their cells, the King of Glory formulates paints (chromoproteins) of purple, blue, green, and red, creating a vibrant coral reef spectacle.

Our amazing Lord richly provides corals with fluorescent pigments known as *pocilloporins*[6] to enhance the music of His underwater orchestra. These chemicals absorb blue light from the Sun and shine forth green, yellow, or red. Jesus designed some of these pigments to absorb dangerous UV radiation as well, thus protecting the coral reef from sun damage.

"Skeleton"

The reef is home to hundreds of fish and invertebrate species. The stage upon which Creation performs Christ's symphony is a large block of *limestone*, built by animals marine biologists call *stony corals*.

Coral reefs are composed of many coral colonies. And each colony is populated by thousands of coral polyps of the same type.

6 We sometimes include the names of biochemicals to illustrate just how complex Creation really is. Jesus created millions of them.

Coral exoskeleton of calcium carbonate

Due to its fragile nature, a polyp secretes an *exoskeleton of calcium carbonate*, forming a tiny hard cup in which it can safely sit. Over hundreds of years, layer upon layer of secreted limestone slowly form a coral reef many feet thick.[7] This greatly adds to the stability of the reef system.

By itself, a single coral polyp could do little to impact Creation. Coral can rapidly divide, however, creating immense cities of identical polyps. Like the architects of ancient civilizations, millions of coral polyps thrive on the limestone remains of their ancestors. Over the centuries, a larger and larger block of limestone gets deposited, and the reef's size becomes mind-boggling indeed. The largest coral reef in the world, the Great Barrier Reef off the northeastern coast of Australia, is over 1,400 miles (2,300 km) long. It is so massive as to be seen from space!

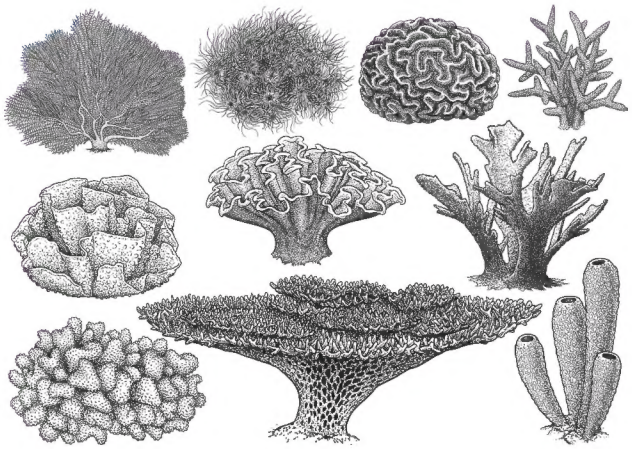
Reef seen from space

7 Coral typically grows anywhere from one to several inches (up to 25 cm) each year.

Second Movement

Wonderful Diversity

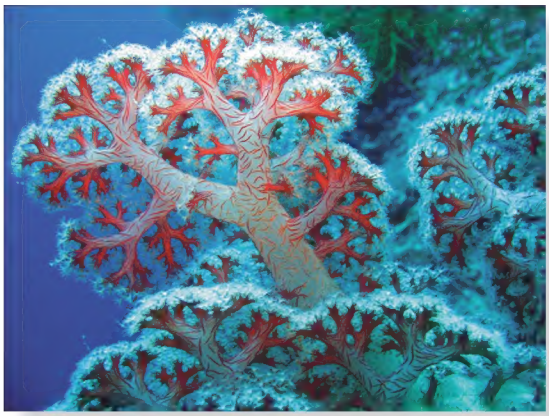
Like an orchestra of many musicians, a coral reef headlines several different species of coral communities or colonies.[8] Each colony of coral possesses a unique architecture, depending on its location in the reef. Individual coral colonies composed of the same kind of coral polyps may take on the shape of antlers, ten-foot-high stalagmites, or even the human brain (brain coral). Staghorn coral forms familiar branching "antlers" in shallow water, but large plates at greater depths. Jesus presumably spreads out the



coral polyps in a plate-like fashion in the twilight of the deep reef to maximize their exposure to sunlight.

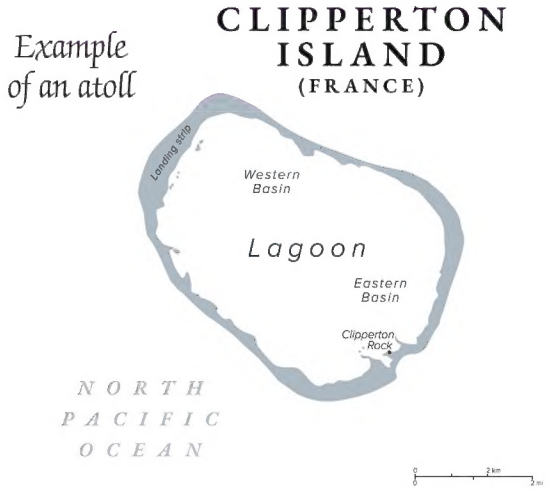
Not all coral animals deposit limestone; our Lord has created equally beautiful varieties of *soft corals*. Soft corals abound on the reef. Their tissue is rubbery and comes in a rainbow of colors. Colonies of soft coral can form delicate fans, whips, and feathers that dance and sway in the ocean current to the "music" of the coral reef symphony.

8 Ninety-two percent of all coral colonies grow in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Caribbean waters are home to eight percent of the total. Scientists at James Cook University have recently estimated that there are "roughly half a trillion" coral colonies in the Pacific Ocean alone.



Stunning soft coral[9]

Three major kinds of coral reef systems reveal the beauty of our Lord Jesus. The *barrier reef* is one. It forms a line of coral that sits some distance away from the shore of an island or coast. Between it and dry land resides a clear, calm lagoon.[10] Another lagoon-containing reef is the *atoll*. An atoll is a fascinating circular reef that usually grows around a sunken island or submerged volcano. Inside the ring of coral is a lagoon. The third type of coral reef Christ created is the *fringe reef*—the simplest of the three. Basically, it forms when coral grows directly adjacent to a body of land. A fringe reef has no lagoon.



9 *Pulau Menjangan* soft coral growing in Bali West National Park
10 A lagoon is a shallow body of water isolated from the ocean by a coral reef, an island, or a sandbar.

Underwater Cities

As the great Composer, our Lord Jesus applies His skills to establish the framework for His coral ensemble. Equally impressive is Christ's orchestration of thousands of individual creatures that call the coral reef home. Like the host of Heaven, they obediently serve their Creator (Daniel 7:10).

A single reef may feature hundreds of different kinds of fish. The most notable quality that coral fish possess is their appearance. A daytime diver visiting a reef discovers a crescendo of living colors. Brilliant yellow, red, and orange; fluorescent blue and green; neon pink and purple—all dart and dance throughout the reef. It is very

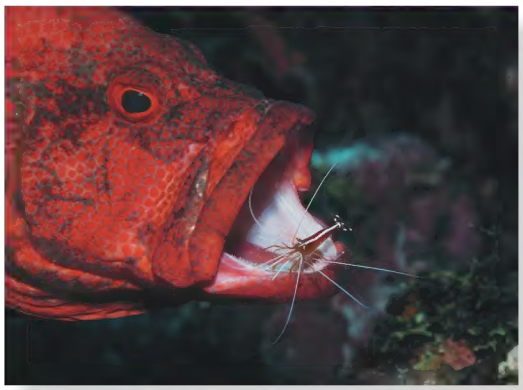
difficult to describe their physical beauty. More importantly, will a visitor to this place recognize our King's glory? The Psalmist asks, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psalm 24:3). We might also wonder . . . Who will *descend and recognize* Christ's glory here?

In love, God provides many coral fish with the ability to tone down their colors at dusk, making them less obvious while sleeping in the safety of the reef. We could say that they "dim their lights" upon retiring. Some of the fish that hunt at night have been painted red or a deep pink. In faint light, red and pink appear as black or gray, thus making the fish virtually invisible.

"Backstage Crew"

Our Lord commands a "backstage crew" to help the coral symphony. Large predatory fish line up to have their bodies picked clean of parasites and sores by other creatures. The cleaning crew is composed of smaller fish and invertebrates—like the banded coral shrimp. *Cleaners* eagerly inspect the scales, fins, gills, and even the mouths of their much larger coral-mates.

If business is slow, a cleaner shrimp will advertise his service by waving his antennae back and forth. Frequently, several shrimp will cooperate in the care of a client, not unlike the service of an old-fashioned gas station. It's remarkable that aggressive fish, which could easily make the cleaners their lunch, become completely docile in their presence. The advantage to the fish being cleaned is obvious—improved health. Along



Cleaner shrimp attending to a grouper

with morsels of food, the cleaners benefit from the protection their large customers provide. This lovingkindness of our Creator is seen throughout nature. His commands are "full of sweetness" (Song of Songs 5:16)!

"It is difficult to describe with words the beauty, complexity, and majesty of the coral reefs."[11] Our Creator's divine attributes of beauty and grace, and the genius of His authorship, are marvelously seen throughout!

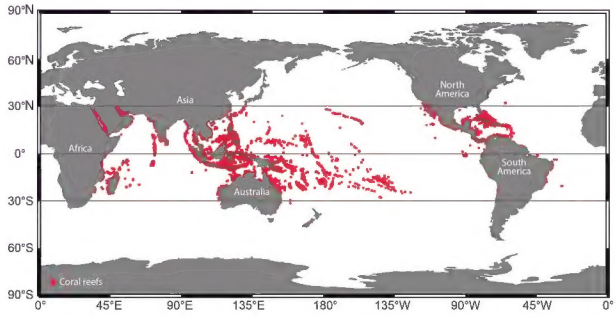
11 H.V. Thurman & H.H. Webber, *Marine Biology*, (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1984), p. 303.

Beauty and Mystery

God has placed limits on much of Creation since the beginning of time (Genesis 1:9-10; Proverbs 8:29). "You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth" (Psalm 74:17).

King Jesus decrees these boundaries to prevent one ecosystem from being overrun by the organisms of another environment, thus safeguarding *His revealed beauty*. When divine borders are violated, Christ's glory becomes obscured or lost altogether (Romans 1:18).

One way Jesus establishes limits for His reefs is by using temperature. The ideal water temperature for coral polyps is 80°F (27°C). Most cease to thrive below 68°F (20°C). As a result, the growth of corals (colored red below) is generally limited to tropical seas, between 30° N and 30° S of the equator.



Another boundary is depth. Corals are usually found in shallow waters (less than 50 meters). They might extend to just beneath the surface, but cannot survive out of water.

Much of Christ's creative ways remain *a mystery* (Isaiah 55:8). Tropical open oceans represent a "marine desert," relatively devoid of life. Coral reefs form underwater "island nations" with well-defined borders—a sudden change from the vast barrenness of the sea to life abundant. Scientists have concluded that "the reasons for this diversity remain unclear."[12] Corals thrive in nutrient-poor waters, a paradox of nature. Yet, twenty-five percent of all marine species flourish in these reefs, including 4,000 kinds of fish!

12 *Coral Reefs*, Wikipedia CC BY-SA 4.0

Third Movement

HYDROTHERMAL VENTS

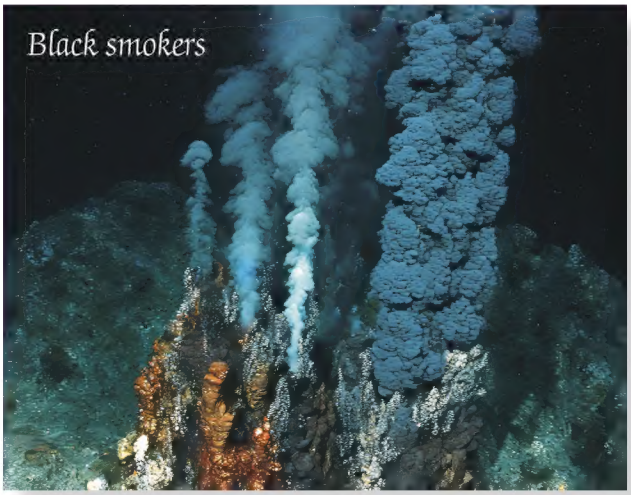
Not all the musical works of man are as moving as Handel's *Messiah*. Some have a quiet elegance, a somber beauty. Their appeal is not in their boldness, but in the richness of their composition. *Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor* is a piece of music we might consider.

Our Lord Jesus has composed a wide range of creative masterpieces, from the lively music of the coral reef to the enigmatic melody of the deep sea. Many ocean environments are hostile, yet ring forth a strange harmony of their own. One such hidden gem is the *hydrothermal vent community* found on the ocean floor.

Hydro- is a Greek word meaning "water," and thermal means "heat." Quite simply, hydrothermal signifies "heated water." The temperature of the sea floor normally hovers near freezing (2°C or 35°F) even in the tropics. There are scattered areas on the ocean bottom, though, that feature vents, spewing out superheated water. What's more incredible is that our Creator establishes communities of specially designed animals that thrive there.

Hydrothermal vents are the "tea kettles" of the cold ocean, one to three miles beneath the surface. They occur where great bubbles of molten rock (magma) collect just below the seafloor. Cracks and crevices in the ocean bottom permit seawater to seep down close to these reservoirs of hot magma. Water then becomes superheated to incredibly high temperatures. Special probes, which can record the energy of water spewing from hydrothermal vents, have measured temperatures as high as 867°F (464°C)![13] Our all-powerful Lord uses the incredible weight of seawater to prevent the searing water from boiling away.

In places, the vents form smoke-stacks that resemble colossal clarinets set on end. Known as chimneys or "black smokers," they can reach a length of ten to one hundred feet. Huge plumes of scalding, black water laden with sulfides pour forth, giving the appearance of smoke. As it cools, minerals are deposited on the sides of the chimneys.


Black smokers

The vent community symphony performs on a very unique and inhospitable "stage" of thick mineral deposits (unlike the limestone of coral reefs). Our Lord Jesus uses scalding liquids to dissolve the minerals iron, zinc, copper, nickel, gold, and silver from the rocks of the ocean floor, as well as the gases oxygen and carbon dioxide. This pungent vent fluid contains large amounts of hydrogen sulfide, which makes the water extremely toxic to most organisms. And it is dissolved iron that stains the water black.

Despite the high concentration of poisonous sulfides, *the Lord of Life* defies human reasoning by "planting a garden" of creatures around these deadly hydrothermal vents. Superheated fluids mix quickly with near-freezing seawater, creating a comfortable environment for animals. It also causes dissolved minerals to precipitate as "black snow,"[14] covering the surrounding seabed.

13 How can any creature survive such temperatures? With Christ, all things are possible! Remember Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3)?

14 Actual snow is created when God mysteriously transforms simple water into beautiful, complex ice crystals.

Now, this is where things get really interesting! Up until the discovery of hydrothermal vents in the late 1970s, it was thought that all ecosystems depended on sunshine and green plants to produce food through photosynthesis.

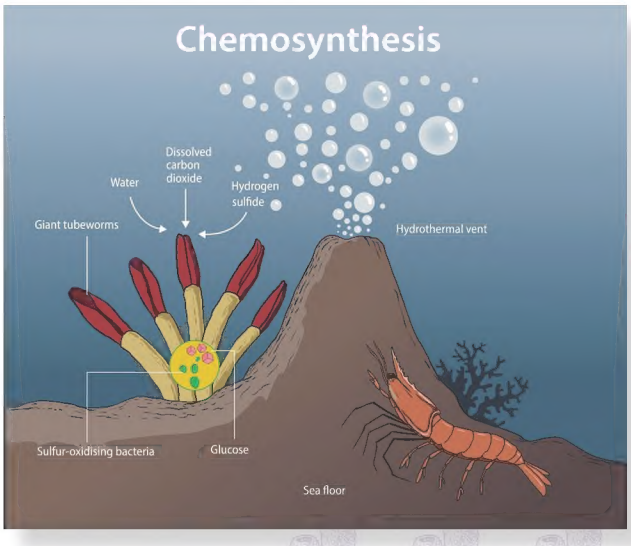
Yet no sunlight penetrates the ocean below one kilometer; therefore, no plants are found growing on the sea floor. In 1977, the conventional wisdom of the scientific world was literally turned upside-down. It was realized that the energy that feeds the animals of the hydrothermal vent communities comes not from the sun, but from underground chemicals.

Water surrounding the hot, billowing vents houses countless bacteria[15] that take the energy stored in hydrogen sulfide and convert it into food. The chemical equation is:

$$H_2S + O_2 + CO_2 \longrightarrow \text{sugar} + S + H_2O$$

hydrogen sulfide, oxygen, carbon dioxide → sugar, sulfur, water

Here is an organism that produces food—not through photosynthesis (that is, using the sun's energy)—but by *chemosynthesis*. What's more, Jesus has formed special partnerships between the bacteria and many vent animals.



Tube worms (Riftia pachyptila)

Using pressure-resistant cameras and special diving equipment, researchers discovered giant worms thriving near hot water vents. These *tube worms* can grow up to nine feet long and an inch-and-a-half thick! Unlike other worms Christ created, they possess *no mouth* and *no stomach*. Jesus embedded trillions of hydrogen-sulfide-eating bacteria throughout the worm's body instead. As we will see, this is crucial to their survival.

Each worm sports a bright red plume at the top of its body. Its red color is due to hemoglobin, the same protein found in our blood that carries oxygen. These crimson plumes act as gills, absorbing hydrogen sulfide, oxygen, and carbon dioxide from the water. In the case of tube worms, hemoglobin primarily transports hydrogen sulfide to the bacteria living in their tissues.[16] (Jesus also scatters other proteins throughout the worm to neutralize the toxic effects of hydrogen sulfide.) Bacteria use the energy God stores in hydrogen sulfide to manufacture sugar from carbon dioxide and oxygen. Like some angelic being, the tube worm never eats, but grows and thrives on sugar made possible by this unique companionship between an incredibly engineered microbe and the worm. *The genius of our great Composer rings forth!*

15 Bacteria and other organisms that thrive in superheated water are known as thermophiles (heat-loving) or extremophiles.

16 In these worms, hydrogen sulfide is carried by the zinc, not iron, of hemoglobin.

This partnership or symbiosis of worm and bacteria is very reminiscent of the relationship between coral and algae (zooxanthellae). As with the coral reef, other animals of the vent community share the rich fortunes of these special microbes. God supplies foot-long clams with "sulfide-eating" bacteria in their gills. It has been estimated that—despite such an inhospitable environment where the sun never shines—these clams grow *700 times faster* than clams found anywhere else on the ocean floor. And like coral reefs, the concentration of living things gathered around vents is 10,000 to 100,000 times greater than the benthic region surrounding them.

A rich fraternity of shrimp, anemone, snails, crabs, octopi, and fish joins tube worms and giant clams there. Clearly, our Creator's orchestration and skill have made this third movement of His underwater symphony more than possible!

"All things are possible with God."
Mark 10:27

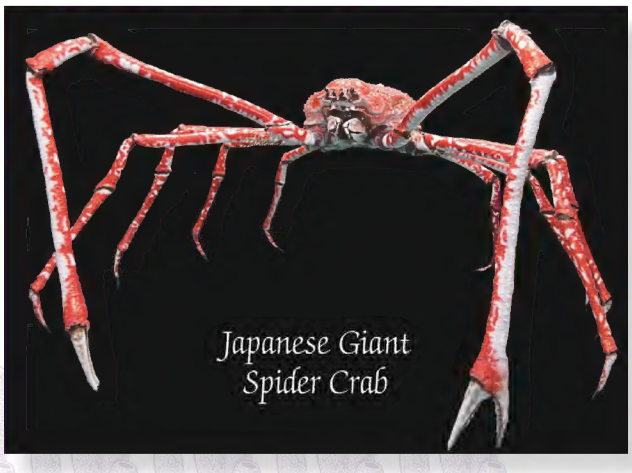
Finale

GIANTS OF GLORY

John Spreull, a godly Scottish pastor, was persecuted by his own countrymen (1646-1722). He experienced imprisonment and torture but never lost his faith in Christ. "Sub pondere cresco" became his motto, which is Latin for *under weight I grow!* We too grow best under stress and trials if we are united to Christ (Ephesians 1). Jesus lovingly designed it this way because He desires us to show His grace and glory in a big way!

Throughout nature, our Lord richly illustrates this principle. In our last Journal issue, we discovered that some of God's largest creatures thrive in the ocean depths. Increasing water pressure does not stunt animals—as we might expect—but greatly encourages their growth.

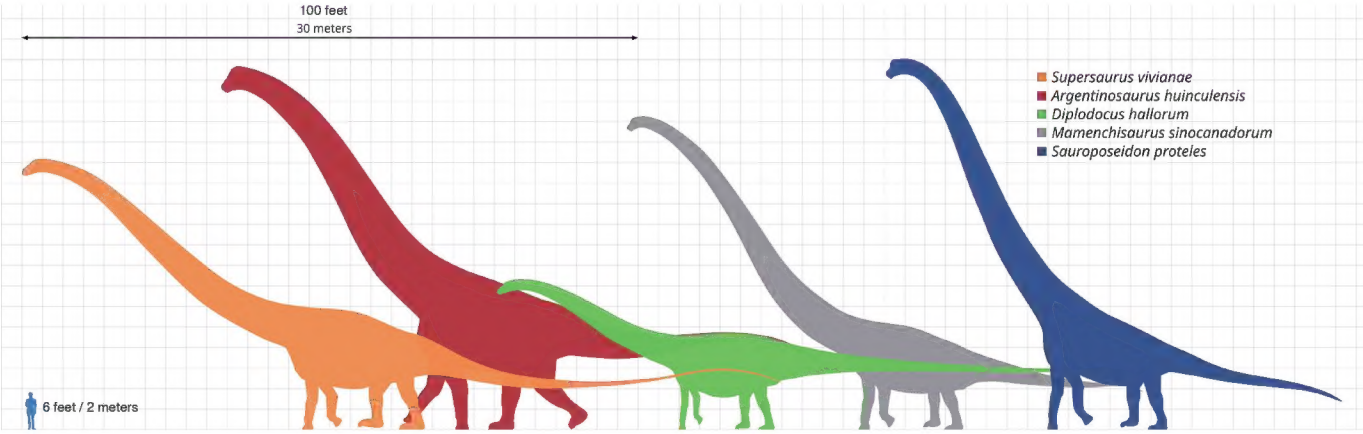
The same seems to be true for temperature extremes. Our incomparable Creator uses oxygen-rich polar water to fashion a home for oversized jellyfish, sea spiders, sponges, starfish, and sharks. At the other extreme, Jesus applies the heat of underwater volcanoes to nurture tube worms, while keeping them from being scalded. Crushing pressures, bone-chilling cold, fiery fluids, and isolation become the crucibles that explode with God's glory!



Macrocheira kaempferi can grow up to 12 feet (3.65 m) across!

GIGANTISM
(larger than normal creatures)

bentho-gigantism	due to high-pressure and oxygen-rich water at the ocean bottom (benthos)	***polar-gigantism***	large invertebrates in Polar Oceans due to the increased oxygen of cold water
paleo-gigantism	large dinosaurs due to a high-pressure, oxygen-rich atmosphere	***insular gigantism***	the tendency of some vertebrates to become large when isolated on islands
thermo-gigantism	found at hydrothermal vents; due to warm water, high-pressure	***theo-gigantism***	due to the pressures of trials in Christ-rich living



And the same can be said of the "spiritual giants" throughout Church history. No one has revealed our Heavenly Father's glory or suffered more from the hands of evil men than our Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to imitate Him (1 Thessalonians 1:6; Colossians 1:24). Peter, Paul, and John walked along the same divinely-ordained path of humiliation. The Apostle John, in particular, "grew large" through deprivation and isolation on the island of Patmos.

One of the Reformation's finest preachers, Pierre Viret (vur-RAY), experienced extreme trials during his blessed ministry. In the early 1530s, he was stabbed in the back by a Catholic priest, leaving him near death. Though his wounds were severe, the Good Physician brought him back to health. Then, in March 1535, a woman purposely poisoned his spinach soup. Again, he nearly died, but recovered through the grace of our Lord. Despite suffering from digestive problems the rest of his life, Pierre Viret went on to become known as the "Angel of the Reformation,"[17] much beloved by his fellow man and respected even by his enemies.

We strongly believe that "those who have the most to say are those who have suffered

17 He got this title because of his humility, gentleness, and peace-making efforts and sincere love of Christ. We highly recommend R. A. Sheats' biography, "Pierre Viret: *The Angel of the Reformation*."

the most." And it is good for us to seek wisdom from those whom Jesus has tested and purified in the furnace of troubles (Daniel 3:19-27; James 1:2-4). Those God placed into the "pressure cooker" of trials have been ordained by His Spirit to greatly exalt the King of Glory for our benefit (Romans 8:28). Our faithful Lord uses struggles and difficulties to strip away worldliness from our lives and grow us in Christ. No one relishes trials in themselves, yet like Jesus, the joy of the Lord comes fully into focus through them (Hebrews 12:2).

The world, under the temporary command of our arch-enemy, demands that all people everywhere conform to its wicked ways. Sadly, many in the visible church today have done just that. When we resist, Satan applies immense pressure upon us to compromise and conform. Please take comfort knowing that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). We may in the end be denied worldly goods or isolated from sources of help, yet our loving Heavenly Father orchestrates all this from eternity past to strengthen us and shine His Son's glory ever more brightly in each of our lives (Ephesians 1:4).

If you have never truly known the joy of the Lord, we beg you to seriously consider receiving His mercy in Christ, even today! By grace, He calls us to repent of our sins (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 2 Peter 3:9) and trust Him that these sins are forgiven. Jesus—being truly God and truly man —accomplished this pardon on a cross, absorbing His Father's wrath against the rebellion of those who would come to believe in Him (Isaiah 53:4–11).

Greenland shark

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Embracing this good news (gospel) will put you at odds with this wicked world. It is, however, the only way to receive eternal life through Christ. C. S. Lewis, in his book "The Great Divorce," paints a striking contrast between the citizens of Heaven and the occupants of Hell. Those in Christ are large and quite solid; the damned grow ever smaller and more insignificant. Which would you choose if you had a choice? The fading, vaporous glory of this world, or the ever-increasing joy of God's majesty in Christ, the King of Glory?

"Your faith is greatly enlarged . . .
in the midst of all your persecutions
and afflictions which you endure."
2 Thessalonians 1:3,4[18]

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